

Have a joyful Christmas!

December 2025



Resistance is all very well, but Christmas only comes once a year. A successful health care plan includes exception clauses. (The recipe for these Caramelnut Bars is on the next page.)

Your Christmas health care plan – a gift only you can give!

Regardless of what is going on out there in today's health care system, we each hold the steering wheel of our own health trajectory. That is an important fact to keep in mind, because according to an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*¹, the health care system discovered long ago that it was far more profitable to treat patients **after** they get sick rather than keeping them from getting sick in the first place. In fact, the article points out a lack of "successful business models aimed at keeping people healthy", and that the path to achieve that aim will require "fundamental changes in the incentives". Well, let's not gamble on that fundamental change occurring in our lifetime; let's take back our own health care **today!** Navigate the holidays, one choice at a time! In fact, maybe it's time to dust off a copy of *Good Food, Great Medicine* (4th edition) and turn to the 14-step Risk Reduction Action Plan on page 90. . .

Meanwhile, ahead is a holiday minefield of obligatory gifting, non-stop party schedules, complicated family politics, and a relentless barrage of seasonal refined carbohydrates. To make the situation even trickier, we can get so busy with holiday stuff that suddenly we realize that the day is almost over, we haven't eaten anything since breakfast, and the healthiest thing in the room is a tray of miniature hydrogenated spinach quiches with one antioxidant apiece. So, dig out last year's stretchy party pants; we need to be comfortable while we're taking back our own health care plan. Read on for a few defensive driving tips.

Dr. Hassell's practice has converted fully from fee-for-service to retainer; Dr. Ellis' practice is unchanged

For current patients who would like to sign up for one of Dr. Hassell's retainer plans, please call us. For more information, click on the *retainer* tab at goodfoodgreatmedicine.com.

If you would like to continue on a fee-for-service basis, you are welcome to see Dr. Ellis. Both doctors continue to work in partnership, and one of the doctors will always be available to see patients for urgent issues if the other is not available.

Your holiday health road map

- **Begin with breakfast.** Think protein + good fat + whole fruit (or vegetable). For a non-stop morning, maybe a hard-boiled egg, banana, handful of almonds . . . but taking breakfast time to plan the day has a favorable cost-benefit ratio.
- **Keep real food handy.** Being too hungry leads to poor food choices. Eat **before** shopping or partying. If you're not thinking clearly due to a sudden acute onset of refined carbohydrate deficiency, a list of snacks taped to the refrigerator can help by doing your thinking for you. (There are lots of ideas on pages 144–146 of *Good Food, Great Medicine*.)
- **Get some exercise every day.** Walking briskly away from the punchbowl, jogging away from the cookie tray, and running from the dessert buffet are all effective.
- **Re-gift candy and cookies . . .** before your resolve weakens. The pleasure they offer is brief, but the inner glow of self-righteousness when you resist them can last for days. If you find yourself stuck perchance with any of those lumpy-looking melt-in-the-mouth buttery cookies rolled in powdered sugar, feel free to just send them to this address and we'll dispose of them appropriately.
- **Think before you drink.** Liquid calories are a common trap, from celebratory eggnog to seemingly innocent apple cider. Our individual risk factors should guide us as to how strict to be, but replacing sweet drinks with sparkling water is always a useful strategy. (A favorite brand of ours is Spindrift.) Spend holiday calories on

¹Cutler, D. and Huckman, R. *NEJM* 2025;393:2177-80

treats like those lumpy-looking melt-in-the-mouth buttery cookies rolled in powdered sugar. . .

▪ **Finally:** Enjoy your favorite delicacies, but don't let the exception clause sabotage your success. Ask yourself, "am I eating or drinking this because it's a special treat or because I'm tired and hungry and would eat a Christmas tree ornament if it was dipped in sugar?" Indulge mindfully, and end your year on a triumphant note.

This could be YOU on New Year's Eve!

You ate a good breakfast – a whole orange (not juice) followed by an egg or two scrambled with chopped spinach and tomato, and a mug of coffee. Then you went for a brisk walk outdoors until you lost feeling in your fingers and toes. Before taking off for some last-minute shopping you grabbed a handful of almonds – not because you were hungry but because you knew you would be by the time you accidentally met the bold gaze of a shameless pastry at Starbucks later.

At a party that evening you ate only one succulent puff pastry sausage thing, and then hunted down anything that looked like a vegetable, filled your plate, and added a slab of prime rib. (Remember the Risk Reduction Rule: A **second** slice of prime rib is a lot healthier than a **first** slice of pie.) You took a glass of punch that someone handed you, but you topped it up with some sparkling water.

With your tummy comfortably full and your head clear, you felt good enough to cross the finish line with a flourish, selecting a forkful or two of banana cream pie and one small cookie (maybe one of those lumpy-looking melt-in-the-mouth buttery cookies rolled in powdered sugar).

Congratulations! You beat the system! And who needs New Year's Resolutions when you have your own year-round health care plan?

Caramelnut Bars

These offer real-food benefit (2 cups of nuts) while still maintaining flagrant in-your-face decadence. The ingredients are standard pantry items, sugar and flour are minimal, and directions are simple enough to complete while the oven preheats. (Once you've made these in your own oven, you may find you need to tweak the cooking time.)

(Makes about 24 bars, ½-inch thick)

- 1 stick (½ cup) butter
- ½ cup dark brown sugar, packed
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 egg
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- ⅓ cup stone-ground whole wheat flour
- 2 cups raw pecan or walnut pieces

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mist 9 x 13-inch baking dish with non-stick spray.

1. Melt butter over medium heat in a 1½–2-quart saucepan. *(I use the same pan to combine all ingredients. Only one dish to clean!)*
2. Add sugar and salt, and stir with a whisk over heat until completely blended. When it begins to bubble, reduce heat and bubble for about 3 minutes. Remove from heat to cool slightly, about 10 minutes.
3. Add egg and vanilla and beat with an electric mixer until well blended. Add flour and beat until smooth. Add nuts and mix thoroughly with a spatula.
4. Scrape mixture into baking pan and spread evenly. (It will be thick and nutty, and it may seem like there's not enough to cover the bottom.)
5. Bake about 18 minutes. Don't overbake! It's okay if it looks a bit underdone; the bars are more luscious that way. Loosen sides with a metal spatula and cool in pan.

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*I bring you good tidings of great joy,
which shall be to all people.
For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,
which is Christ the Lord!*

Luke 2:10,11 (KJV)